

Buying an RV is Serious Work

You love the “look,” but can you live in it?

Whether you are going to spend \$50,000, \$150,000 or \$350,000 for that first or fifth RV, you need to look at it a bit “differently” before you purchase. This is especially important if you are new to RVing, moving to another class of RV, or currently have no slides or are moving from no slides to one with 3–4 slides. It is even more important if you plan to fulltime or just live in it for long periods of extended travel. You can put up with nearly any inconvenience for a couple of weeks but not several months!

Walk into any new RV and you will likely see various decorative accessories—i.e., vases, scarves, flowers, etc.—all tastefully placed to enhance the “look” when you walk through. I confess, our RV no longer looks like the showroom model and yours won’t either. As shown here, your “stuff” needs to be usable and accessible and cannot be totally put away after each usage. Just for breakfast, you need that coffee pot, toaster



oven, paper towels, and trash can to all be accessible. Do you have room in that new RV? Is there ample counter space? Note that I am not talking about storing these things but do you have room to actually have the things available that you need to use when you are cooking breakfast—or any other chore inside the RV?

Simply ignore this sales tactic and mentally try to put your own “stuff” in the coach. The more RV experience you have, the easier this is to do. However, be careful assuming you have “experience.” For example, if you have only lived in a single-slide coach and are considering a quad-slide, you don’t have that experience!

Do This

Here are a few tips that may save your sanity and lots of money. Once you seriously narrow your choice to one or two RVs, schedule a day, dress comfortably, and try this...

- **Do it alone.** Politely ask the sales rep to leave and that you will find them when necessary. It’s okay to find them and ask a question but send them away again.
- **Spend time**—lots of time—looking and thinking. Plan 6–8 hours or more just to look at the RV. Consider this... If you are spending \$200,000 and you look for four hours, then your time spent looking has a value of \$50,000 per hour! You cannot afford to rush back to mow the lawn or fix dinner when your time is that valuable. Keep looking and thinking.
- **Sit down.** With all slides out, sit, talk, or read. Most chairs are comfortable at first so sit for at least 30 minutes (an hour is better)—like you would watching TV, reading, visiting, or whatever you normally do in the evenings at your home or current RV. Just recreate what you normally do most evenings. Then trade seats and do it again. If this is a Class A, swivel the driver and passenger seats. Do they work? Are they comfortable, too? Could people (guests?) really sit in them for an hour or two?
- **Lie down.** Spend 30 minutes on the bed. Take a nap. If your sleep style is like “spoons,” then do this. If you are “elbows-out” sleepers, then do this. Do you have room? Does your elbow hit the light switch/window shade/cabinet/generator-start switch when you roll over? Do your feet hang out? Are your feet in a drawer? Is your “headboard” a bedroom window in one of the slides? If you sit up in bed to read or watch TV, you

cannot lean against the pull-down nightshade. What to do? You can change your sleep style for a few nights but not for a few months!

- **Slides in and out.** Sit, again. Spend time sitting and moving around with **each slide in and out**. What is **not accessible** when a slide is in? Are there cabinets, drawers, or circuit breakers you cannot access? Some RVs cannot be fully used with the slides in. Can you use the bed, bathroom, get to stuff in the kitchen, and the closet? There are numerous campsites where you cannot put out certain slides due to trees, boulders, shore power poles, etc. Can you watch TV, cook, shower—i.e., live comfortably and normally—with the slides in?
- **Coffee pot, etc.** Where will you store it with the slides in (traveling) and out (parked)? How about your toaster oven, trashcan, computer, shoes, pots, underwear, etc. Discuss this stuff while sitting and testing those chairs up front.
- **Outside stuff.** All external storage compartments look big when empty. Stick your head in **all** of them—then look up—now, what's hanging down from the ceiling of each storage compartment? If anything is hanging down, that will limit the height of any items going into the compartment. If it's pass-through storage, are you going to install those sliding trays? If so, this will reduce your compartment's height. If it's pass-through storage, are the openings the same size on both sides (no, this is not a trick question)? Will your garage-full-of-tools fit? What about that new 9-burner grill? Will you have to move the tools to get the grill? Bring some empty boxes the size of items you will store. Use the boxes to check the compartment space.
- **Utilities.** Pull the electric cord all the way out, pull out or screw on the water hose, attach the sewer hose to the coach, and close the compartment door—like you were really hooking up. Is it easy, difficult, awkward, awful? Did you have to get on your knees or stand on your head? Now

put them away. How easy would it be in the dark, kneeling on gravel during a cold downpour?

- **Leveling.** Really level this RV. Move it (or have the sales rep move it) and level again. Drive it someplace where it will **not level** (have the sales rep put the front or rear wheels on a ramp in their garage to create an unlevel situation). How does it feel unlevel? Do all the appliances work? Is the coach usable?

If everything looks good, works well, and fits you, drive (or tow) the RV. Schedule at least an hour for the road test. If you know the area, map out a test-drive route with your car. Tell the sales rep you want to drive up and down maximum grades, over rough railroad tracks, on Interstate and side roads, over some gravel, and through an industrial park (they have wide streets and typically are not too busy especially weekends and evenings). If they ask why you need that much time, tell them you are planning to spend lots of money and want to make sure of what you are buying. If they refuse, politely thank them and leave. There are always other dealers.

Lots of Work

So, by now you are thinking that you really don't want to screw around with all this. Okay, then don't. Looking at an RV is serious work. At minimum, you are going to spend at least 10–12 hours per day in this RV with just basic living (sleeping, bathing, eating, watching TV, etc.). Your time spent looking will pay back in dividends later. Spending lots of money for something you really can't use or are uncomfortable with is just not good. Look carefully, choose carefully, and take your time. It's a big investment. Remember, you don't know what you don't know.